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Relations of Shah Nematollah Vali

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ABSTRACT

The present article examines the relations and interactions of Shah Nematollah Vali, the founder of the Ni'matullāhī Sufi order, with the social, political, cultural, and religious structures of the Timurid period. The primary objective of this study is to analyze the behavioral patterns and social role of Shah Nematollah Vali through his mystical teachings and his perspective on the transformations of his historical context. Within this framework, the study investigates his role in the expansion of Sufism and Islamic mysticism, the promotion of convergence among diverse social, religious, and political groups, and his efforts toward the realization of social justice. By utilizing his spiritual and intellectual capacities, Shah Nematollah Vali succeeded in presenting a model of religious and spiritual leadership that maintained relatively constructive engagement with political authorities while simultaneously preserving intellectual and ideological independence. The article also addresses the challenges and limitations he encountered, including confrontation with opposing intellectual currents and the long-term negative consequences of certain political interactions. Analysis of these dimensions contributes to a deeper understanding of leadership strategies and methods of addressing social crises during that historical period. Ultimately, the study emphasizes the enduring potential of Shah Nematollah Vali's teachings and highlights the applicability of his model to contemporary challenges, particularly in the fields of intercultural, interreligious, and interethnic relations. Accordingly, Shah Nematollah Vali may be regarded not merely as a historical figure but as a social model capable of guiding contemporary societies in addressing issues of religious, ethnic, and political pluralism.

Keywords: *Shah Nematollah Vali; Social Convergence; Intellectual Challenges; Socio-Political Interactions.*

Introduction

Sayyid Ne'matollah ibn Mohammad Ali, widely known as Shah Nematollah Vali, was a Husayni descendant and is regarded as one of the prominent figures of Islamic mysticism and Sufism in the medieval period. He was born in Makran, located in a region corresponding to present-day Sistan and Baluchestan. His lineage traces back to Imam Musa al-Kazim, and this genealogical affiliation not only granted him social prestige but also significantly strengthened his spiritual authority among various segments of Islamic society, particularly among Shi'i communities (1). Throughout his life, Shah Nematollah Vali traveled extensively to major intellectual, religious, and



cultural centers of Iran, including Herat, Shiraz, Yazd, and Samarkand, eventually settling in Kerman. This residence laid the foundation for the formation of one of the Shi'i Sufi branches, namely the Ni'matullāhī order, which continued to flourish after his death (2, 3).

He was intellectually influenced by eminent mystical figures such as Khwaja Abdullah Ansari of Herat, a pioneer of Khorasani mysticism, as well as Hafez of Shiraz, the renowned mystical poet of Iran. These influences can be observed in the synthesis of mystical and religious thought reflected in his poetry and teachings. Drawing upon the teachings of the Ahl al-Bayt and emphasizing the spiritual authority of the Twelve Imams, Shah Nematollah Vali rearticulated Sufism within the framework of Twelver Shi'i worldview, such that ethical conduct, spiritual discipline, and social thought in his approach were deeply imbued with Shi'i intellectual and devotional orientations (4, 5).

The Ni'matullāhī movement played an active role in social developments and even political relations of the time. Possessing a relatively comprehensive combination of scholarly, spiritual, ethical, and social capacities, Shah Nematollah Vali was able to exert influence during one of the most turbulent periods of Iranian history—the era spanning the Ilkhanids, the Timurids, and the early Safavid period—an era characterized simultaneously by sectarian conflicts and intense struggles for political power among ruling dynasties (2).

Shah Nematollah Vali sought to establish a form of peaceful and constructive coexistence among diverse social, religious, and political groups. His teachings emphasized not only asceticism, personal spiritual refinement, and self-purification, but also conveyed clear messages concerning social justice, unity among Muslims, and ethically grounded participation in political affairs (1, 4).

His relations with rulers, local governors, and religious scholars at times reflected cooperation and at other times opposition. In confronting external threats, he relied upon conciliatory and peace-oriented teachings; however, when facing distortions of doctrine or pressures against the Sufi path, he adopted explicit and protective positions aimed at preserving the integrity of his spiritual tradition (3).

It should be emphasized that the primary focus of the present study is the examination of the behavior, social performance, and relational dynamics of Shah Nematollah Vali within the institutional structures of his era. Accordingly, this article does not intend to affirm or reject his personal beliefs or doctrines; rather, its purpose is to provide a critical analytical exploration of his conduct and interactions across various historical contexts. Through a careful and non-judgmental analysis of his relations and engagements, this study seeks to offer new perspectives on managing social crises, fostering intercultural interaction, and addressing intellectual and cultural conflicts in the contemporary world. In a global environment marked by cultural, religious, and political diversity, the convergence-oriented and dialogical aspects of Shah Nematollah Vali's thought may serve as a meaningful model for effective interaction among modern societies.

Personality Analysis

Scholarly and Mystical Characteristics of Shah Nematollah Vali

Shah Nematollah Vali is recognized as a spiritual master whose intellectual capabilities accompanied his mystical authority. The following section examines the most significant scholarly and mystical dimensions of his personality.

Intellectual and Philosophical Depth

One of the fundamental principles of his thought is *wahdat al-wujud* (Unity of Being), a concept rooted in the teachings of Ibn ‘Arabi, according to which existence represents nothing but the manifestation of a single divine reality. In his writings—especially in his poetic corpus—Shah Nematollah Vali repeatedly emphasized this principle and described the world as a manifestation of divine names and attributes (4, 6).

“We are waves that never rest in one place within the sea;

We are all one light and one manifest ocean.”

(7)

Overall, the intellectual system of Shah Nematollah Vali may be regarded as a distinctive example of Shi‘i mystical philosophy—a system attentive not only to theoretical concepts such as Unity of Being, the Perfect Human, and divine knowledge, but also to practice, spiritual purification, and the realization of divine ethics within individual and social life. This intellectual tradition continued among his disciples and followers in subsequent centuries and became one of the epistemological foundations of the Ni‘matullāhī order (1, 4).

Ability to Communicate with Diverse Social Groups

As a Sufi master, Shah Nematollah Vali possessed an exceptional ability to communicate with various social strata. He succeeded in attracting and influencing individuals ranging from ordinary people to intellectual elites and political authorities. This communicative capacity constituted one of the defining characteristics of his personality and significantly contributed to the dissemination of his mystical and social teachings (3).

Communication with Ordinary People

By employing accessible language and comprehensible concepts, Shah Nematollah Vali made complex mystical teachings understandable to common people and lower social classes. This characteristic enhanced his popularity among ordinary communities and enabled him to gather numerous followers. Particularly in rural and non-urban environments, his teachings proved easily comprehensible and practically applicable (4). The use of simple terminology, emotionally resonant language, and concrete pedagogical methods allowed individuals to engage with mystical teachings without requiring advanced philosophical training.

Communication with Intellectual and Scholarly Elites

Shah Nematollah Vali maintained intellectual connections with figures such as Hafez of Shiraz and Khwaja Abdullah Ansari, benefiting from their teachings; this intellectual exchange contributed to the deeper articulation of mystical concepts within his own works (4, 8).

Ethical Excellence and Spiritual Self-Purification

From an ethical perspective, Shah Nematollah Vali may be considered one of the exemplary figures in the history of Islamic Sufism and mysticism. Throughout his life, he remained committed to moral and spiritual principles and consistently pursued the purification of the soul. He perceived himself as a spiritual teacher and ethical guide whose moral teachings were manifested not only in speech but also in everyday conduct (4).

Practical Conduct and Ethical Model

Shah Nematollah Vali believed that ethical principles must permeate all dimensions of human life and become visible in daily behavior. Historical accounts describe him as strictly committed to ethical discipline, never neglecting

moral responsibility in his personal life. In social relations, he demonstrated ethical speech while actively cultivating moral virtues among followers and disciples. Honesty, humility, and compassion formed the central pillars of his interactions with others (9).

Emphasis on Love and Submission to God

Within Shah Nematollah Vali's spiritual worldview, love (*mahabbah*) constituted a central element of self-purification. He regarded divine love as the essential spiritual principle guiding humanity toward perfection and proximity to God. This theme appears repeatedly in his writings and discourses, through which he encouraged liberation from egoism and movement toward divine affection. In his perspective, human beings attain the state of *fana* (annihilation in God) only by abandoning worldly attachments and seeking solely divine love (10).

Conceptualization

The Sides of the Triangle of Positive Relations

To conduct a complete and comprehensive examination of an individual's relations, it is necessary to analyze and evaluate that person's behavior and performance within the framework of a "triangle of relations." This triangle consists of three principal sides—foundations, goals, and conditions (determinations, and related factors)—while strategic orientations appear through patterns of convergence and divergence. Based on this model, relational types are categorized into three groups: interaction, confrontation, and tolerance (11). In this study, an attempt is made to explain Shah Nematollah Vali's relations by using the triangle-of-relations model; however, for an accurate and profound understanding of any historical personality, it is essential first to examine that person's individual characteristics. Accordingly, a precise and comprehensive understanding of Shah Nematollah Vali requires analytical inquiry into multiple dimensions of his life and ideas.

Foundations: These relations are shaped by three primary pillars: ethical and spiritual foundations, Sufi principles, and human and moral values, which are discussed in detail in his works.

Ethical and Spiritual Foundations

In Shah Nematollah Vali's writings, ethical and spiritual foundations are presented as the primary roots of "positive relations." These foundations are closely connected to the notion of spiritual wayfaring and inner perfection. Shah Nematollah Vali maintained that every person must attain proximity to God through self-purification and spiritual strengthening, and only then can one establish sound relations with others. In practice, these foundations serve the elevation of the soul and the formation of relationships grounded in respect, love, and forgiveness (7).

In Sufism more broadly, ethical foundations are often articulated through two major dimensions: *tazkiyat al-nafs* (purification of the self) and the spiritual stations of *fanā' fi Allāh* (annihilation in God) and *baqā' bi Allāh* (subsistence through God). These dimensions are evident not only in the theoretical teachings of Sufi authors, but also in the life and works of Shah Nematollah Vali as the founder of the Ni'matullāhī order. In his writings—especially his poetic corpus and mystical compilations—these concepts appear in prominent and recurrent form (4, 9).

Purification of the Self: Inner Refinement and Avoidance of Vices

Among the most central pillars of Sufi ethics is *tazkiyat al-nafs*, or the refinement of the inner self. This concept denotes cleansing the soul from negative traits such as envy, arrogance, hypocrisy, rancor, and other moral defects that impede human perfection and spiritual growth. Emphasizing this point, Shah Nematollah Vali repeatedly

highlights self-purification as the first step in spiritual wayfaring, particularly in his poems and mystical treatises. He argues that one must transcend ego-centeredness and self-attachment, and instead walk a path of love and surrender to the divine will. In his poetic language, he urges followers to engage continuously in purification and to remain vigilant against moral corruption (4, 7).

Sufi Principles in Positive Relations

Shah Nematollah Vali was deeply influenced by Sufi teachings and the legacies of major authorities in Islamic mysticism. He believed that Sufi principles can cultivate constructive human relationships based on empathy, love, and mutual respect. Accordingly, principles such as love, surrender, and service to creation are presented as foundational pillars in developing “positive relations” (10).

Love and the Practice of Love

One of the most fundamental concepts in Islamic mystical tradition—particularly within Sufi currents—is **love** and the active practice of loving. This concept holds a central place in the writings of major Sufi thinkers, and Shah Nematollah Vali addressed it in an especially profound and extensive manner. In his perspective, love is not merely a human emotion or an interpersonal bond; rather, it is a pathway to apprehending the truth of existence and witnessing the manifestation of the Divine Essence. He holds that love is the substance of the bond between human beings and God, and that without it, no authentic understanding of mystical meanings is possible (4, 7).

In conclusion, love in Shah Nematollah Vali’s worldview is not only an ethical principle but also a method of mystical wayfaring and a means for realizing divine unity and spiritual witnessing. The seeker enters the world of meaning through love and, by extending love to creation, attains the spiritual stations of annihilation and subsistence in the Divine.

Surrender to the Divine Will

Surrender to the divine decree denotes unconditional acceptance of events, occurrences, and human destiny—an inward state of satisfaction and tranquility that arises from a deep recognition of divine wisdom. Jalal al-Din Rumi frequently addresses this principle in the *Masnavi*, presenting it as a key to liberation from worldly suffering and a prelude to union with Truth. In one passage he states:

“Whoever is surrendered—love him;
For he seeks the beloved’s pleasure day and night.”
(12)

In this verse, surrender is not portrayed as passive resignation but as an aware and loving act that nurtures contentment and social concord. From a Sufi-mystical standpoint, a person who is surrendered to the divine will is less prone to anger, envy, greed, and resentment, because whatever arrives through others is understood as part of divine wisdom; consequently, such a person tends to adopt gentle, patient, and conciliatory behavior in social interactions (4, 10).

Service to Creation

In Shah Nematollah Vali’s teachings, service to creation is framed as the concrete manifestation of divine love and as a means of drawing nearer to God. He maintained that closeness to God is realized through attention to human beings and assisting them, thereby translating spiritual commitments into social responsibility and moral action (1, 4).

Human and Moral Values

The spiritual and ethical values that stand at the heart of “positive relations” in Shah Nematollah Vali’s works are rooted in an ethical-spiritual mode of life in which the individual seeks both inner elevation and social reform. These values include:

Honesty

In Shah Nematollah Vali’s teachings, honesty is recognized as one of the most important human virtues. In interpersonal relations, it enables durable bonds grounded in mutual trust (10).

Humility and Modesty

Humility is another prominent principle in Shah Nematollah Vali’s writings. He regarded modesty as essential not only to individual spiritual discipline but also to social relations and communal cohesion (4).

Divine Love

Love of God, as a foundational Sufi principle, also manifests in positive relations. Shah Nematollah Vali emphasized that divine love empowers human beings to love others as well, and to uphold sincerity and dignity in their relationships (7).

Based on the triangle-of-relations model, it can be argued that in both his works and conduct Shah Nematollah Vali paid sustained attention to ethical foundations, Sufi principles, and specific human values. Concepts such as love, surrender to the divine will, and service to others are articulated in his thought and framed within Islamic mysticism, shaping part of his broader worldview (4).

Goals and Context: The development of spirituality with a Sufi orientation, the expansion of Islamic mysticism, and the creation of convergence among diverse communities appear in Shah Nematollah Vali’s works; these are outlined below.

Developing Spirituality with a Sufi Orientation in Shah Nematollah Vali’s Teachings

One of Shah Nematollah Vali’s principal aims was to elevate spirituality in society through a Sufi orientation. He held that spirituality is achieved only through direct relationship with God and self-purification. He emphasized that the individual must reach truth through mystical wayfaring and inner purification, and he presented practices such as repentance, remembrance (*dhikr*), and meditation as tools for strengthening the bond with God (7, 9).

Self-Purification

Shah Nematollah Vali argued that for authentic spirituality and proper relation with God, a person must first reform the inner self. This reform takes shape through purification from negative traits such as self-love, arrogance, and envy (10, 12).

The Human–God Relationship

He also stressed contemplation of divine attributes and reflection on the beauty of creation. This emphasis is strongly connected to humility and the spiritual horizon of annihilation in God, and it appears repeatedly across the broader Sufi ethical literature within which his teachings are situated (4, 10).

Expanding Islamic Mysticism

Shah Nematollah Vali is considered among the most influential figures in the expansion of Islamic mysticism, particularly in Iran and Central Asia. By founding and developing the Ni‘matullāhī order, he transmitted his mystical

teachings to diverse communities and translated many of his written principles into institutional and social practice (1, 3).

Mysticism and Society

Shah Nematollah Vali maintained that Islamic mysticism is not limited to personal salvation; it should also operate at social and cultural levels. By inviting people to mystical wayfaring and establishing religious–mystical centers, he sought to introduce mysticism as a path for reforming and improving society (1, 9).

Cultivating Spiritual Inwardness

Relying on mystical teachings, Shah Nematollah Vali assisted individuals in reaching truth through inward searching and reflection, and in applying this truth within social relations. This integration of spirituality into both individual and social life is presented as one of his major contributions to the dissemination of Islamic mysticism (4).

Creating Convergence Among Different Communities

One of the significant and prominent dimensions of Shah Nematollah Vali's mystical thought is his emphasis on the role of mysticism in creating convergence and solidarity among different communities, including both Muslims and non-Muslims. He did not regard mysticism merely as a path of individual spiritual wayfaring; rather, he viewed it as an instrument for realizing peace, coexistence, and mutual understanding among cultures and religions (4). In Shah Nematollah's perspective, mysticism—centered on divine love and the doctrine of the Unity of Being—enables human beings to transcend the narrow boundaries of ethnicity, sect, and geography and confront a shared and universal truth (3, 4).

This outlook can be observed clearly in his poetic and prose works. In many of his poems, he stresses concepts such as love, unity, freedom from sectarian prejudice, and an invitation to altruism and compassion. One of his well-known verses reads:

“Whoever binds the heart to Truth
Sets foot upon the path of purity.”
(7)

In this couplet, Shah Nematollah Vali underscores that any person—regardless of religious or sectarian affiliation—enters the path of purity and human unity if they devote their heart to divine truth. Such a vision provides the basis for a trans-sectarian and trans-civilizational approach capable of building connections among diverse communities (4).

Mystical studies have likewise noted that many major figures of Islamic Sufism, including Shah Nematollah Vali, emphasized the Unity of Being in ways that effectively softened rigid outward boundaries between religions and instead focused on shared spiritual commonalities among human beings. This perspective is also evident in the intellectual legacy associated with Ibn ‘Arabi and is treated as an important current within Iranian mystical tradition (4, 6).

From a social standpoint, Shah Nematollah Vali's mystical discourse—within its historical context—can also be interpreted as a constructive response to the sectarian and factional conflicts of his era. By calling for peace, and

by offering an alternative discourse in the face of religious extremism, he articulated a framework that could serve as a foundation for interaction and coexistence both within the Islamic world and across different religions (3).

Given contemporary global challenges, revisiting such ideas—rooted in Iran's historical and cultural experiences—may contribute to developing practical models for addressing intercultural and interreligious conflicts. Mysticism, as Shah Nematollah Vali emphasizes, is not only an individual experience but also a social strategy for human convergence and cohesion.

Love and Convergence

Shah Nematollah Vali believed that the most fundamental factor in creating convergence among different communities is affection and love for God. By emphasizing humanistic and ethical teachings, he sought to diminish sectarian and ethnic boundaries and to create conditions for understanding and interaction among communities (4, 7).

Universalizing Islamic Mysticism

Given the wide influence of the Ni'matullāhī order across different regions, Shah Nematollah Vali was able to disseminate his mystical teachings throughout much of the Islamic world. This diffusion helped create spiritual bonds among Muslims and even beyond, functioning as a form of "universalization" of Islamic mysticism through which unity and cultural solidarity among diverse communities became possible (3, 9).

Cultural and Social Contexts for the Development of Spirituality and Islamic Mysticism

The contexts Shah Nematollah Vali envisaged for developing spirituality and expanding Islamic mysticism included multiple social, cultural, and even political factors. Several of the most salient are noted below.

Establishing Mystical and Sufi Schools

One of Shah Nematollah's most important initiatives for promoting and institutionalizing Islamic mysticism was the establishment of mystical centers and **khanqahs** in various regions of Iran and other Islamic lands. These centers—known in Sufi tradition primarily as *khanqah* or *ribat*—performed not only educational and formative functions but also social, cultural, and even political roles (1). With a deep understanding of the *khanqah* as a social institution, he utilized its capacity to expand the Ni'matullāhī order as a significant branch of Islamic Sufism, while simultaneously facilitating convergence and interaction among different strata of society (1, 3).

The Educational and Formative Role of Khanqahs

The mystical schools and *khanqahs* established under Shah Nematollah Vali's influence were not merely spaces for seclusion and worship; they were also places where ethical, formative, mystical, Qur'anic, and jurisprudential subjects were taught. Within these centers, he developed an organized system of instruction in which seekers were trained from the initial stages of the path to higher spiritual stations within the Sufi order. This formative process relied upon established Sufi disciplines—such as self-refinement, retreat, meditation, and spiritual struggle—while also being guided by direct instruction from the master (4, 9).

In contrast to certain Sufi paths that inclined toward social withdrawal, Shah Nematollah Vali's *khanqahs* exhibited a distinctly social orientation. Alongside spiritual instruction, they addressed social and economic concerns and emphasized human relations. Seekers were expected, in addition to observing spiritual etiquette, to practice honesty, justice, fairness, and kindness in everyday interactions. In practice, this model cultivated a network of social actors who carried mystical values into the wider community (1, 4).

The Social Function of Khanqahs and the Expansion of Convergence

Following the model attributed to the Ahl al-Bayt and earlier mystics, Shah Nematollah Vali presented the khanqah as a space for companionship and conversation among diverse groups—from the poor and the wealthy to scholars and ordinary people. He believed that mysticism, by virtue of its human-centered essence, could provide an appropriate foundation for social and religious convergence. Accordingly, within Ni‘matullāhī khanqahs, sectarian, ethnic, and class differences tended to fade, and participation in a shared spiritual experience replaced rigid social boundaries (4).

Historical accounts and biographical compendia report that Sufi centers associated with Shah Nematollah Vali were established in areas such as Mahan in Kerman, Yazd, Shiraz, and even the Indian subcontinent, or that his disciples and followers—under his influence—created khanqahs in those regions following similar patterns. This geographic expansion not only indicates his spiritual influence but also reflects the effectiveness of his organizational model in attracting social participation (1, 3).

Mystical Institutions as Alternatives to Social Fractures

At a time when Islamic societies in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries faced sectarian crises, internal wars, and religious tensions, mystical institutions such as Shah Nematollah Vali’s khanqahs played a calming and unifying role. In these centers, dialogue and tolerance were promoted instead of conflict, and seekers were expected to behave respectfully not only toward co-religionists but also toward adherents of other faiths and schools (4, 9).

Shah Nematollah Vali’s emphasis on love, human fraternity, and human dignity significantly shaped the behavioral structure of the Ni‘matullāhī path. This characteristic contributed to his order gaining acceptance among both Sunni and Shi‘i communities, and it also attracted attention from non-Muslims living within the broader Iranian cultural sphere (3, 4).

Accordingly, it may be concluded that Shah Nematollah Vali’s establishment of mystical schools and Sufi khanqahs was not merely a spiritual initiative; it represented an organized movement with multidimensional aims: training seekers, expanding Islamic mysticism, promoting ethical values, and generating social convergence in response to the tensions of the time. These centers offered an indigenous model of education, spiritual living, and social interaction that can still be relevant today for re-reading cultural and socio-religious patterns in the Iranian-Islamic context.

Social Culturalization

Shah Nematollah Vali sought to create conditions conducive to the growth of spirituality in society through cultural reform. In this regard, he transmitted his mystical and ethical meanings to the broader public through poetry and literature, thereby contributing to the spread of spirituality at the social level (4).

By focusing on the development of Sufi spirituality, the expansion of Islamic mysticism, and the strengthening of social convergence, Shah Nematollah Vali attempted to respond to the needs of his era. Through the establishment of khanqahs and the promotion of principles such as divine love and service to creation, he offered a practical model linking individual spirituality to social reform (1, 4).

Determinations and Socio-Political Conditions: In this section, engagement with contemporary governments and the impact of Sufi movements on society in Shah Nematollah’s approach are explained as follows.

1. Engagement with Contemporary Governments

Like many other eminent mystics, Shah Nematollah Vali maintained complex relations with the governments of his time, relations that directly or indirectly influenced Sufi movements and their social effects. These relations can be analyzed on two levels:

1. Sufi relations with governments in the form of support and interaction.
2. Resistance to, or critique of, governments—especially in response to corruption and social injustice/oppression.

Interaction with Rulers

Relations with Ilkhanid Authorities and Local Amirs

He not only avoided direct confrontation with rulers, but in some cases also benefited from their explicit support. Such support—particularly during his settlement in Mahan, Kerman—has been recorded as coming from regional amirs and played an important role in the expansion of the Ni‘matullāhī order (1, 2).

Critique of Governments

One of the prominent dimensions of Shah Nematollah Vali’s thought and social action is his critique of power structures and of social and religious corruption. In his poems and writings—especially in his poetic corpus—one can discern clear traces of criticism regarding the conduct of rulers and the profound class divide within society. Employing allegory and metaphor, he calls into question the structural corruption governing political authorities and religious institutions, and he underscores the necessity of deep ethical, political, and social reforms. For instance, in one of his poems he states:

“Whoever behaves well toward people—may God be his ally;
Whoever comes with oppression and corruption—shall be ensnared.”

(7)

Beyond poetry, Shah Nematollah Vali’s social presence in establishing Sufi circles that played an active role in the spiritual and political formation of disciples also supports an understanding of his critical posture toward structures of power. These circles frequently functioned as refuges for the oppressed and for seekers of truth, and in this sense they can be interpreted as loci of “soft resistance” against injustice (1, 4).

The Impact of Sufi Movements on Society

Sufi movements—including the Ni‘matullāhī movement founded by Shah Nematollah Vali—had deep effects on the social, cultural, and religious structure of society. These movements not only fostered reforms in the domain of spirituality and individual ethics, but also contributed to broader social and cultural transformations.

Expansion of Spirituality and Social Reforms

Sufi movements in Shah Nematollah Vali’s era, particularly through their emphasis on self-purification and ethical refinement, were able to play an effective role in social reform. Although many of these movements were shaped by political conditions, they nevertheless expanded—especially among lower social strata exposed to oppression and corruption—and helped create a moral and spiritual space that counterbalanced social and political pressures (4).

Social and Cultural Teachings

Alongside its emphasis on Sufism and individual spiritual wayfaring, the Ni‘matullāhī movement exerted substantial influence on social relations. Many of Shah Nematollah Vali’s followers—particularly across different regions of Iran and Central Asia—contributed to the reform of social, ethical, and cultural relations by disseminating

the movement's teachings. These reforms increased social and cultural awareness in various communities and, in consequence, supported major social changes aimed at improving living conditions, especially among lower strata of society (3, 10).

Socio-Political Determinations and Conditions in Shah Nematollah Vali's Era

Shah Nematollah Vali lived during a period of significant political and social change in the Islamic world. Different Islamic governments were striving to preserve sovereignty and power, while Sufi movements—through their emergence and expansion—played a meaningful role in social transformations. In particular, during Timurid and Ilkhanid rule, Shah Nematollah Vali was able to draw upon the prevailing religious and cultural climate to develop mysticism and Sufi practice.

The Timurid and Ilkhanid Periods

Shah Nematollah Vali lived under the rule of the Timurids and the Ilkhanids, each of which generated its own distinctive conditions. During the Timurid period, owing to the presence of rulers with strong orientations toward religion and the arts, Sufi movements expanded in many regions, including Khorasan, Fars, and Mazandaran. In this context, Shah Nematollah Vali was able—through support from certain local rulers and by aligning in part with prevailing religious policies—to consolidate his social and political position (2, 4).

Political Pressures and Their Effects on Sufi Movements

Across different periods, Sufi movements were influenced by specific political conditions. For example, during Timurid rule and under pressures exerted by authorities—especially in religious matters—some Sufis were compelled to resist rulers and states in order to preserve their spiritual independence (4, 9).

In the period in which Shah Nematollah Vali lived, interaction between mysticism and politics assumed a new configuration. By maintaining relatively balanced relations with some local rulers and avoiding direct confrontation, he facilitated the expansion of the Ni‘matullāhī path; at the same time, through indirect and socially oriented critiques of corruption and injustice, he performed a reformist role within society.

Domains of Communication

Intellectual–Doctrinal: Defending Sufi doctrines and confronting religious deviations.

Intellectual and Religious Contexts in Shah Nematollah Vali's Era

Shah Nematollah Vali's era was marked by tension and intellectual–religious challenges in the Islamic world. On the one hand, Sufis promoted Islamic mysticism by emphasizing spiritual wayfaring and experiential, visionary knowledge; on the other hand, certain jurists and theologians representing kalām and fiqh traditions raised objections—especially regarding Sufi doctrines and debates surrounding the “Unity of Being” and the “path” (*ṭarīqah*). Within this environment, Shah Nematollah Vali, as a major spiritual guide, defended Sufi doctrines through rational and philosophical argumentation and opposed religious deviations and faulty theological reasoning (4, 9).

Defending Sufi Doctrines in Shah Nematollah Vali's Thought

In addition to mystical experience and spiritual discipline, Shah Nematollah Vali strengthened foundational Sufi principles at an intellectual and theoretical level by drawing on Qur'anic verses and Prophetic traditions. Key principles include:

Emphasis on the "Unity of Being" and the Truth of Oneness

One of Shah Nematollah Vali's most important intellectual principles was *wahdat al-wujūd* (Unity of Being). This principle—developed prominently in Islamic mysticism and associated with Ibn 'Arabi—emphasizes the divine presence in all manifestations of existence. Shah Nematollah Vali used this framework to argue that God is present throughout the cosmos and that the human being, by grasping this unity, can reach the station of human perfection. He reinforced this doctrine not only through mystical language but also through theological and philosophical reasoning, and he employed Qur'anic and hadith-based concepts to demonstrate that such perspectives are not incompatible with monotheistic belief (6, 7).

Divine Love and Spiritual Wayfaring

Shah Nematollah Vali strongly emphasized love of God and spiritual wayfaring. In his teachings, love of God is not merely a private emotion; it is a transformative force with healing implications for both individuals and society. He held that to reach divine truth, the human being must overcome egoic obstacles and walk a path of love for God and God's creation. This perspective was articulated as a route toward perfection and divine knowledge, countering accusations that Sufis deviated because of their emphasis on personal and visionary experience (4, 9).

The Relationship Between Sharī'ah and Ṭarīqah

Alongside defending mystical doctrines, Shah Nematollah Vali stressed the necessity of harmonizing sharī'ah and ṭarīqah. He believed that mystical wayfaring and access to divine truth cannot be achieved without observing religious law and obligations. In this view, ṭarīqah (the spiritual path) serves sharī'ah, and without adherence to sharī'ah no true perfection is possible in the mystical journey. Thus, he sought to remove potential fractures between sharī'ah and ṭarīqah, presenting them as two balanced and complementary "wings" (4).

Confronting Religious and Theological Deviations

Beyond defending Sufi doctrines, Shah Nematollah Vali confronted various religious and theological deviations prevalent in his era. These included extremist tendencies within certain groups and blasphemous accusations directed against Sufis. In response, he answered critiques with patience and with scholarly and mystical argumentation.

Addressing Extremism Within Sufi Currents

In many of his works, Shah Nematollah Vali emphasized the necessity of observing ethical and religious principles among Sufi followers. He also courageously criticized forms of extremism that had appeared among some Sufi groups. Certain Sufis—without regard for legal and ethical standards—had turned to excessive ritual

dancing and innovationist practices; Shah Nematollah Vali regarded these not only as incompatible with authentic mysticism but also as deviations from the true Sufi path (4, 10).

Responding to Attacks by Jurists

Shah Nematollah Vali also responded to attacks by jurists who accused him and his followers of unbelief and innovation. In particular, he argued that the concept of Unity of Being, contrary to some juridical and theological criticisms, ultimately remains compatible with divine unity and constitutes a deeper interpretive understanding of tawḥīd aimed at grasping God's true meaning within the world (6, 7).

Critiquing Incorrect Approaches to Qur'anic and Hadith Interpretation

He further criticized certain superficial and non-scholarly interpretations that had become widespread in Islamic communities. By emphasizing rigorous interpretation of Qur'an and hadith from mystical and philosophical perspectives, he sought to purify Islamic teachings from reductive readings and to present a deeper understanding of scriptural meanings (4, 9).

Socio-Political: Efforts to reduce local conflicts and establish social justice.

Local Conflicts and Social Problems in Shah Nematollah Vali's Era

During Shah Nematollah Vali's lifetime (the fourteenth–fifteenth centuries), Iran and surrounding regions continued to face extensive political and social crises. Major problems included internal disputes among local rulers and persistent wars among competing authorities. These conflicts—particularly intense in Khorasan, Transoxiana, and other parts of Central Asia—generated widespread social and economic instability. Moreover, many communities experienced severe hardships due to oppression and corruption among local rulers. These crises not only weakened political structures but also adversely affected the social morale and spiritual life of the population. Under such conditions, Shah Nematollah Vali—drawing on considerable moral and spiritual authority—sought to reduce these crises and promote social justice at the local level (2, 4).

Shah Nematollah Vali's Efforts to Reduce Local Conflicts

Relying on mystical teachings and ethical principles, Shah Nematollah Vali worked to reduce unrest and conflict at local and social levels. Key approaches include the following:

Promoting Ethical and Human Principles Among the People

Shah Nematollah Vali consistently emphasized ethics and human virtues. Through spiritual and mystical instruction, he encouraged people toward peaceful conduct, empathy, and cooperation. One of his core teachings was “love for humanity,” presented as a fundamental pillar for reducing conflicts and crises. In his view, human beings should abandon hostility and rancor and instead pursue tranquility and friendship with others (4, 7).

By establishing khanqahs and educational centers, he transmitted these teachings to society. In these institutions, alongside religious and mystical instruction, human values such as patience, humility, forgiveness, and reconciliation were taught. These centers functioned as spaces for social connection and local dispute resolution and, especially in unstable regions, had positive effects in reducing conflict (1, 9).

Facilitating Peace Processes and Mediation

From his position as a spiritual guide and mystic, Shah Nematollah Vali served as a mediator in local disputes and even among local rulers. In many cases, using his spiritual influence, he reduced tensions and established gatherings or councils among conflicting parties to identify pathways to peace (9). This capacity was particularly effective in regions where competing rulers were in open conflict. By emphasizing religious and mystical principles, he helped create a conciliatory environment among diverse social and governmental groups.

Calling for Convergence Among Muslims and Different Schools

Shah Nematollah Vali made sustained efforts to reduce sectarian and religious tensions and to strengthen unity among Muslims. At a time when sectarian disputes—especially between Shi'i and Sunni communities, and between Sufis and legalistic scholars—were intensifying, he strongly emphasized the necessity of convergence among Muslims across schools. He argued that unity should arise from shared bonds and from robust moral and religious principles, and that such unity plays a foundational role in strengthening and stabilizing Islamic society (4).

While promoting mystical teachings, he simultaneously stressed the importance of unity within the Islamic community. In his view, sectarian conflict leads to fragmentation and harms Muslim cohesion; therefore, he sought to cultivate a social atmosphere in which Muslims could move beyond differences and emphasize common principles (4, 12).

These efforts contributed to his recognition as a peace-oriented and influential figure in the history of Iranian Sufism, whose actions aimed at strengthening convergence and reducing religious conflict (4).

Establishing Social Justice in Shah Nematollah Vali's Thought

In addition to his efforts to reduce conflicts, Shah Nematollah Vali more broadly emphasized **social justice** in his intellectual program. He maintained that justice must be observed not only in interpersonal relations but also within social structures. Some of his principles and actions aimed at realizing social justice include the following.

Emphasis on Equality and Human Rights

Shah Nematollah consistently stressed the importance of equality, human rights, and the equal standing of human beings before God. These principles are evident not only in his writings and poetry but also in his social and political orientations. In an era when Iran's social and economic structures were sharply hierarchical and unequal, he repeatedly insisted on the necessity of human equality and the preservation of human dignity. In his view, no individual should be considered socially or economically superior to others; all human beings are equal in their human worth before God (4).

In his poems, he urged rulers and officials not to abuse power and to remember that all people are equal in God's sight. Such critiques were framed not merely as condemnations of oppression and social corruption, but as a call for justice and equality within the Islamic community (12).

"Rulers of oppression and corruption never escape God's punishment." (7)

Ultimately, Shah Nematollah Vali's emphasis on equality and human rights not only became foundational for many social and mystical teachings among his followers, but also left deep effects on the Islamic society of his time and beyond. By using the accessible medium of poetry and public discourse, he transmitted these teachings to

broader audiences, which helped ensure the historical persistence and influence of his messages—especially regarding human dignity and social equality (4).

Social Reform Through Encouraging Ethical Conduct

By emphasizing both individual and social reform, Shah Nematollah Vali sought to encourage people to observe ethical principles. He believed that establishing social justice is possible only through inner reform and the purification of the individual soul. For this reason, he focused on educating and cultivating his followers toward the realization of a just society, teaching them to orient their lives toward service to others and the pursuit of justice (10).

In circumstances marked by local conflicts, governmental corruption, and sectarian divides, Shah Nematollah Vali attempted to act as a mediator, a social reformer, and an advocate of justice. By promoting calls for unity across religious schools and by criticizing social discrimination, he worked to create a calmer and more equitable social environment and to expand the possibilities for peaceful dialogue.

Scientific–Cultural: Expanding mystical ideas and establishing khanqahs.

The Expansion of Shah Nematollah Vali's Mystical Ideas

As a prominent mystic, Shah Nematollah Vali presented his mystical thought in a coherent and dynamic manner through scholarly, literary, and educational works. His ideas encompassed deep concepts in Islamic mysticism and methods of spiritual wayfaring, shaped primarily by Qur'anic and hadith-based teachings, personal mystical experiences, and philosophical reflection. Key characteristics of his mystical thought include the following.

Emphasis on Divine Love and the Unity of Being

One of the central pillars of Shah Nematollah Vali's mystical worldview is **divine love** and the **Unity of Being**. He believed that the foundation of any spiritual movement and mystical wayfaring must rest on love of God and on grasping divine unity across all manifestations of existence. In his poetry and teachings, love of God and the pursuit of spiritual paths are presented as means of approaching divine truth and realizing human perfection (4, 7).

The Concept of Practical Tawhīd and Individual Wayfaring

Beyond emphasizing doctrinal tawhīd, Shah Nematollah Vali placed particular emphasis on **practical tawhīd**—meaning that an individual must manifest the signs of divine oneness through everyday actions and conduct. In other words, mysticism for him was not merely an inner or mental spiritual experience; it was transformed into an ethical and social practice that shaped both individual and collective life. This concept played an important role in his teachings, in everyday conduct, and in the reconciliatory function of khanqahs (9).

The Relationship Between Knowledge and Mysticism

Shah Nematollah Vali also emphasized the necessity of connecting knowledge and mysticism. He believed that knowledge and insight lead human beings to perfection through two pathways: one through reason, and the other through mystical experience and inward witnessing. Accordingly, as an intellectually oriented figure, he engaged not only in mystical instruction but also in teaching and disseminating learning across diverse subjects (4).

Establishing Khanqahs as Scientific and Cultural Centers

One of Shah Nematollah Vali's most important actions was establishing khanqahs as educational and cultural institutions. Although these khanqahs were initially known as meeting places for Sufis and spiritual seekers, they gradually developed into cultural and scholarly centers. In them, alongside mystical and spiritual instruction, religious sciences, philosophy, jurisprudence, and even empirical learning were taught.

Khanqahs as Centers of Learning and Research

The khanqahs established by Shah Nematollah Vali were not only places for worship and mystical discipline; they also functioned as scholarly centers. Within them, mystics and Sufis—while pursuing spiritual formation—engaged with intellectual and cultural discussions and exchanged knowledge and ideas. Alongside promoting Sufi teachings, these institutions became sites for ethical, philosophical, and Qur'anic-exegetical study and for the emergence of new cultural and scholarly currents (10).

Promoting a Culture of Dialogue and Intellectual Exchange

A defining feature of khanqahs was the calm and intimate environment in which followers from different strata of society could engage in discussion and intellectual exchange. In this space—especially during Shah Nematollah Vali's period—interaction among jurists, sages, poets, and mystics flourished. This process not only contributed to scholarly and cultural growth but also strengthened cultural convergence within Islamic society. In an era marked by social and political crises, such exchanges played a vital role in preserving and expanding different bodies of knowledge (4).

Khanqahs as Centers of Social Formation

Beyond scholarly and cultural functions, khanqahs also served as formative institutions for social improvement. Shah Nematollah Vali emphasized individual and social reform, viewing khanqahs as sites for ethical cultivation and spiritual education. In these centers, alongside instruction in knowledge and mysticism, followers were trained to develop ethical conduct and human values such as honesty, fairness, humility, and empathy (7).

Scientific and Cultural Effects of Establishing Khanqahs

The establishment of khanqahs and the dissemination of Shah Nematollah Vali's mystical ideas exerted substantial influence on later scholarly and cultural developments. Key effects include the following.

Establishing a Comprehensive Educational System

Shah Nematollah Vali's khanqahs functioned as comprehensive educational centers that integrated knowledge and mysticism in a unified framework. This integration enabled the teaching and study of religious and mystical subjects alongside philosophical and scholarly works. Such an educational structure not only supported intellectual growth but also stimulated the production of new literary and cultural works (9).

Disseminating Mystical Teachings Across Regions

As formative institutions, Shah Nematollah Vali's khanqahs became longstanding centers for spreading his mystical teachings across different regions of Iran and Central Asia. Beyond attracting new followers, they also served as institutions for transmitting and circulating his works, thereby ensuring that his mystical teachings continued to influence Islamic culture in later periods (4).

Context Analysis

Analysis of the Political and Social Conditions of the Timurid Period

Shah Nematollah Vali's lifetime coincided with Timurid rule and complex political transformations that strongly affected social and religious relations. In these circumstances, he was able to play a prominent role as an influential figure.

Political and Religious Conditions Under the Timurids

The Timurid period—especially during the rule of Timur and later under Shah Rukh and his son, Sultan Husayn Bayqara—was among the most complex and tense eras in Iranian history. On the one hand, Timurid policies emphasized constructing a strong centralized state and promoting cultural development; on the other hand, the era witnessed religious tensions between Sunni and Shi'i communities as well as among different Sufi groups. Under these conditions, Shah Nematollah Vali, through establishing khanqahs and promoting mystical ideas, indirectly contributed to strengthening social and religious cohesion. In particular, during Sultan Husayn Bayqara's period, he established close relations with rulers and exerted spiritual influence upon them (2, 3).

The Effect of Political Conditions on Shah Nematollah Vali's Decisions and Relations

By understanding the political and social realities of his time, Shah Nematollah Vali showed significant flexibility in decisions and relationships. Using his spiritual and mystical influence, he sometimes intervened to address social and political issues among different groups. These orientations contributed to his recognition among rulers and the public as an important and influential personality. For instance, in many cases he reduced tensions among religious and political groups through negotiation and mystical interpretation, thereby supporting unity and social solidarity (4).

Shah Nematollah Vali's Influence on Followers and Society

In addition to his scholarly and mystical characteristics, Shah Nematollah Vali deeply influenced his followers and society. By promoting mystical and ethical teachings—especially concerning divine love, the Unity of Being, and the role of the human being in spiritual perfection—he provided distinctive guidance to followers. Particularly under harsh and politically tense conditions, his teachings were often regarded as a path toward inner peace and toward social and religious cohesion (4).

Types

Convergence: Examples of Shah Nematollah Vali's Interactions with Intellectual, Cultural, and Political Elites

Shah Nematollah Vali's Interaction with Intellectual and Cultural Elites

As a mystic and thinker, Shah Nematollah Vali maintained close interactions with many intellectual and cultural elites of his time. Drawing upon mystical and religious teachings, he worked to develop and promote spiritual thought while using the cultural climate of the era to strengthen ties with other thinkers and elites.

Scholarly Dialogues with Jurists and Philosophers

Beyond mystical teaching, Shah Nematollah Vali was active in jurisprudential, philosophical, and scholarly fields. He participated in intellectual exchanges with major jurists and theologians of his era, including prominent Shi'i and Sunni scholars. Such interactions strengthened his spiritual and scholarly standing in society. In broader intellectual history, his influence is also discussed in relation to later philosophical and theological developments and to the expansion of Islamic mysticism in Central Asia and India (4).

Cultural Influence Through Poetry and Literature

Shah Nematollah Vali used poetry and literature as an effective cultural instrument for communicating his ideas to society. In his poetic corpus he articulated mystical and ethical concepts, thereby promoting Islamic and Iranian cultural meanings. These cultural effects helped him gain a special position not only among Sufi followers but also among broader literary and cultural elites. Over time, his literary works—characterized by accessible yet profound language—came to be regarded as significant texts within Persian literature (7).

Interaction with Governmental and Political Elites

Shah Nematollah Vali interacted not only with scholarly and cultural elites but also played a meaningful role in governmental and political arenas. His connections with rulers and political elites were a defining feature of his period and contributed to convergence between spiritual and political domains.

Relations with Local and Central Rulers

He made use of political authority to support Sufi movements and to expand his mystical teachings. During Timurid and Ilkhanid rule, he leveraged relations with certain rulers—such as Sultan Husayn Bayqara—to amplify his cultural and spiritual influence. These relationships were particularly influential in building schools and khanqahs and in disseminating Sufi teachings. Rulers' support for Shah Nematollah Vali's activities, especially in social and cultural domains, contributed to the consolidation of Sufi influence in society (2, 9).

Critique and Engagement with Government Policies

At the same time, Shah Nematollah Vali emphasized the role of mystics in critiquing governmental policies. In many works, including his poetry, he pointed to social corruption and corruption within governments and stressed the need for social and spiritual reforms. These critiques—often expressed as moral counsel—carried social and political implications and aimed at reforming both society and rulers. In this respect, he sought to promote social reform with goodwill and without direct confrontation (10).

The Timurid Period and Support for Mysticism

During Timurid rule—especially under Sultan Husayn Bayqara—Shah Nematollah Vali maintained firm relations with rulers, enabling him to expand the Ni'matullāhī movement. In this period, Timurid support for Sufis and mystics,

particularly Shah Nematollah Vali, contributed to mysticism and Sufi practice becoming accepted elements of the religious and social culture of the time (2, 4).

Examples of Cultural and Political Convergence in Shah Nematollah Vali's Interactions

In many instances, Shah Nematollah Vali was able to use cultural and political space to foster convergence among social classes and among cultural and governmental elites. Examples include:

Developing Khanqahs and Scholarly Centers

Especially during Timurid rule, he was able—through support from local and central rulers—to establish numerous scholarly centers and khanqahs. These were not only places of mystical formation but also venues for exchanging cultural and social ideas (1, 9).

Ethical and Social Teachings Through Poetry and Literature

Using language and poetry, Shah Nematollah Vali created meaningful bonds among cultural, social, and governmental elites. In his poems he addressed ethical and social points that, on one hand, called for self-reform and social reform, and on the other hand contained subtle critiques of social and governmental conduct (7).

Shah Nematollah Vali maintained interactions with intellectual, cultural, and governmental elites that contributed, to some extent, to convergence among these groups. He engaged scholars and philosophers in intellectual discussions and promoted mystical and social concepts through poetry. His relations with rulers such as Sultan Husayn Bayqara helped expand Sufi teachings, while he also voiced moral critiques of governmental conduct.

Divergence: Instances of His Confrontation with Opposing Intellectual or Political Currents.

Confrontation with Opposing Intellectual Currents

Shah Nematollah Vali, particularly in his own time, encountered various intellectual currents, some of which stood in tension with his Sufi and mystical teachings. This section addresses several of the most important currents that conflicted with Shah Nematollah Vali's perspectives.

Confrontation with Strict Legalism and the Ahl al-Hadith

One of the most significant intellectual currents opposed to Sufi and mystical teachings in Shah Nematollah Vali's era consisted of strict legalists and Ahl al-Hadith tendencies, which strongly emphasized adherence to the outward forms of religion and meticulous compliance with sharī'ah rulings. Many jurists and theologians of the time—especially across Khorasan and Iran—advanced positions that centered on criticizing Sufism and mysticism, often characterizing Sufism as a deviation from sharī'ah and religious norms (9).

Shah Nematollah Vali, especially in his poetry and formative works, emphasized that Sufism and mysticism are not opposed to sharī'ah; rather, they contribute to its completion and deepening. From his mystical standpoint, obedience to sharī'ah must be realized in the depths of the human being—within inward disposition and spiritual consciousness—whereas legalists tended to focus primarily on external observance and strict implementation of rulings (4).

This intellectual tension between Sufis and strict legalists at times led to intermittent clashes between Shah Nematollah Vali's followers and his opponents, including condemnations issued by certain jurists against some Sufi figures and practices.

Confrontation with Anti-Mystical Thought in the Timurid Period

During the Timurid period, Shah Nematollah Vali faced certain intellectual trends shaped by philosophical and theological approaches critical of mysticism. Although philosophy and mysticism have long-standing historical connections, there were at times substantial differences on issues such as metaphysical realities and conceptions of human perfection. In response to such anti-mystical orientations, Shah Nematollah Vali sought to defend the social and ethical dimensions of mysticism, while also treating philosophical reasoning as a tool that could clarify Sufi teachings rather than replace lived spiritual experience. In his view, mysticism as a direct and personal encounter with divine truth should not be subordinated to rigid rationalism or to purely philosophical allegorization (4, 7).

Confrontation with Opposing Political Currents

Beyond intellectual conflicts, Shah Nematollah Vali also resisted certain political currents that either opposed him or threatened his spiritual and social position. These confrontations largely appeared as opposition to despotic or corrupt rulers across different Islamic governments.

Confrontation with Despotic and Corrupt Governments

Shah Nematollah Vali lived in a period when many governments suffered from political and social corruption. Particularly under Timurid and Ilkhanid rule, many authorities were criticized for despotism, oppression, and financial and social corruption. Shah Nematollah Vali critiqued social and political corruption in his literary and mystical works and called for foundational reforms within Islamic society (10).

Although he sometimes supported certain rulers for cultural or religious reasons, he did not refrain—especially when governments fell into corruption—from opposing such policies and wrongful conduct. These oppositional positions were often expressed through mystical poetry and ethical wisdom, in which he called for spiritual and social reform and a return to moral principles.

Opposition to Despotic Timurid Rule

During Timurid rule, some rulers—such as Sultan Husayn Bayqara, who paid particular attention to cultural and artistic affairs—supported Sufis and mystics. Nevertheless, Shah Nematollah Vali opposed forms of despotism grounded in coercion and pressure upon the population, especially in periods when ruling structures were marked by corruption and oppression (4).

Evaluation and Model Proposal

Strengths

1. Capacity to Create Convergence Among Different Groups

1.1 Capacity to Produce Spiritual and Social Convergence

As the founder of the Ni‘matullāhī order, Shah Nematollah Vali played a distinctive role in fostering convergence among diverse religious, intellectual, and social groups. He was able to attract followers from different social, cultural, and even political backgrounds. A major factor in his success was the comprehensive and human-centered

approach embedded in his teachings. By emphasizing peace, divine love, and the Unity of Being, he invited different groups to interact and to build relationships grounded in mutual understanding and respect (3, 4).

This aspect of Shah Nematollah Vali's influence can be observed particularly in his relations with rulers and religious scholars. At a time when Iranian society witnessed intense religious and political tensions, he used mystical teachings to build bridges between court and people, between jurists and Sufis. In particular, he maintained close and positive relations with Sultan Husayn Bayqara, a Timurid ruler, and through this connection helped promote Sufism within Timurid court culture (2).

1.2 Influence in Scholarly and Mystical Domains

Shah Nematollah Vali also exerted deep influence in scholarly and mystical fields. By establishing khanqahs and mystical schools, he created a setting in which followers could learn and disseminate diverse Islamic sciences alongside mysticism and ethics. Ni'matullāhī khanqahs, as educational and cultural centers, influenced not only Sufi communities but also—especially during the Timurid period—played an important role in cultivating intellectual and cultural elites (1, 4).

Weaknesses or Challenges

1. Limited Capacity to Counter Opposing Intellectual Currents

One of Shah Nematollah Vali's major challenges during his lifetime was confronting opposing intellectual and religious currents. In the Timurid period, certain strict legalist and anti-Sufi orientations strongly opposed Sufism and, in particular, Shah Nematollah Vali's mystical teachings, often treating Sufism as innovation and deviation from shari'ah. In responding to these currents, Shah Nematollah Vali relied primarily on peaceful methods and dialogue; however, due to political and religious pressures, he could not always fully neutralize such accusations. This created limitations on the free spread of Sufi teachings and sometimes intensified religious confrontation (3, 9).

1.2 Potential Long-Term Negative Effects of Political Engagement

As a spiritual leader, Shah Nematollah Vali also faced political pressures. One significant challenge was his engagement with rulers and courts. Although he was sometimes able—through Timurid rulers and political relationships—to promote Sufism socially, such engagements could place his teachings under political and social pressure. Over time, some analyses argue that such engagement can represent a long-term vulnerability, insofar as Sufism may become influenced by governmental interests and lose its spiritual independence and neutrality. In different historical moments, Sufism sometimes shifted from a spiritual movement into an instrument employed by rulers, producing long-term negative effects (4).

Accordingly, one critical weakness attributed to Shah Nematollah Vali is excessive engagement with rulers, to the extent that Sufism could become instrumentalized by political power—an outcome that stands in tension with the principle of tolerance. It is argued that strong dependence on rulers and political interactions may have led, to some extent, to the subordination of his teachings to political interests and, rather than full resistance to oppression and corruption, occasional functionalization of mysticism for political ends.

Model Proposal

1. Using Shah Nematollah Vali's Teachings to Strengthen Social and Cultural Interaction

1.1 Strengthening Social Convergence

As a major model of convergence-building, Shah Nematollah Vali can be considered a spiritual reference for strengthening social unity in contemporary conditions. His teachings were grounded in social justice, peace, and respect for human beings across diverse social and religious contexts. In today's world—marked by social and cultural crises—these teachings may be used to strengthen convergence among different social and religious groups. In societies facing ethnic, religious, and cultural tensions, Shah Nematollah Vali's model may offer practical guidance.

1.2 Emulating His Approach to Social and Political Challenges

Shah Nematollah Vali adopted a wisdom-based and prudent approach to social and political challenges. In tense conditions, he managed complex issues through positive dialogue and cooperation with social elites and rulers. This approach can function as a model for contemporary leaders and policymakers confronting multiple political and social crises. His teachings on peace, cooperation among cultures and religious schools, and the management of social crises may offer useful resources for addressing present-day challenges.

Conclusion

Shah Nematollah Vali, through his remarkable capacity to foster convergence among diverse social, intellectual, and religious groups, played a significant role in the historical development of Iran and the Islamic world. Nevertheless, he also encountered challenges and limitations in confronting religious opposition and competing intellectual currents, which at times restricted the free expansion of his Sufi teachings. Despite these constraints, his social and cultural teachings may still serve as an effective model for strengthening social and cultural cohesion, particularly within contemporary societies.

The managerial patterns demonstrated by Shah Nematollah Vali in addressing political and social crises—characterized by peaceful engagement, the promotion of social justice, and emphasis on unity among ethnic and social groups—can provide valuable guidance for modern leaders and policymakers in managing crises and global tensions.

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All authors equally contributed to this study.

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The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

All ethical principles were adhered in conducting and writing this article.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

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